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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 000486

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FOR NEA, PRM AND AMBASSADOR FOLEY

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [EAID](#) [JO](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: IRAQI IN JORDAN UPDATE - FEBRUARY 14

REF: AMMMAN 265 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: UNHCR ramped up referrals to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) in early 2007. UNHCR staff began pilot testing of a new database to link its assistance programs with those of partners and its resettlement efforts; if successful, UNHCR will go live with the system by late March. Jordanian officials confirmed that they have not ironed out the details of the mechanism for an Iraqi visa system, and GOJ/GOI officials continue to dance around the GOI's USD 8 million pledge, though senior GOJ officials have confirmed to Ambassador they are committed to finding a mutually-acceptable way to have the funds transferred. END SUMMARY.

UNHCR: Referrals, Security, and the BIS  
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¶2. (SBU) In a February 5 meeting, Resident Representative Imran Riza stressed to Emboffs that UNHCR would meet the USG-UNHCR agreed-upon total of 4,350 referrals by April 30. Note: Given the OPE's average 4.8 month processing time, this would provide a comfortable margin for those selected from this pool to be resettled by the end of FY08. End Note. According to Riza, UNHCR refers approximately 130 persons per week to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), and is diverting staff to maintain this effort. Through February 5, Riza said UNHCR Jordan has referred 2,260 individuals in FY08.

¶3. (C) Shaken by the January Algiers bombing of UN offices, UNHCR has taken additional security measures at their offices in Amman. Riza and staff expressed hope that their recently operationalized phone query system will reduce the number of Iraqis that congregate outside their offices. UNHCR staff received two threats the first week of February from two Iraqis frustrated with the progress of their cases. Riza explained that they take such threats seriously, and reviewed measures -- including a new concrete separation barrier -- designed to keep their operations safe.

¶4. (SBU) UNHCR Jordan is pilot-testing a BIS (Beneficiary Information System) database among its partners that captures basic biodata and assistance needs information of UNHCR-registered and non-registered Iraqis. The database permits UNHCR partners to upload into a common database basic data (including identification, identified needs and services being provided) of each beneficiary. UNHCR expects the database will permit its staff to identify Iraqis that could be eligible for resettlement, facilitate the referral of Iraqis to service providers and reduce duplication of services. UNHCR will conclude the pilot-phase of the database by late March, and determine if the system can accommodate information from NGOs and other civil society organizations who are not partners with UNHCR.

## Circuit Riders

15. (SBU) Through February 7, DHS circuit riders interviewed 749 individual Iraqis for resettlement as part of an eight week circuit ride ending on March 13. Admissions officers expect to interview approximately 2,135 Iraqis by March 13. During this circuit ride, they conditionally approved 60 percent of cases, placed 24 percent on hold, denied 6 percent, made no decision due to material support issues for 8 percent and had a two percent no-show rate. IOM staff lamented that an additional 57 Iraqis would have departed for the U.S. on January 31 if not for rare snowfall that blanketed Jordan in nearly two feet of snow.

## Visa Mechanism Still Unclear

16. (C) Despite repeated press reports that the GOJ and GOI have agreed upon a visa mechanism, the GOJ has not/not yet announced an official visa requirement for Iraqis. In conversations with GID officials on February 3 and MOI officials on February 7, GOJ officials told the consular chief that they have not finalized their rules or procedures with regards to Iraqi visa applications, and could not estimate when they would do so. Press reports announced that they selected the firm TNT to act as a courier service to transmit visa applications from five or six offices throughout Iraq to Jordan. According to UNHCR's Riza, TNT will charge approximately USD 15 for this service and the GOJ will not charge additional fees. Several supposed implementation dates have been announced for the visa regime: December, January, and February - all of which have come and passed.

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17. (C) The GOJ decision to grant amnesty to Iraqis who have overstayed residence permits as part of the new visa regime remains opaque. According to UNHCR's Janssen, during the UNHCR High Commissioner's meetings with King Abdullah and Prime Minister Dahabi on February 12, the GOJ policy on overstay fines was not discussed. Yet two days later, the Jordan Times reported that Iraqis who wish to leave permanently will be granted full amnesty of their overstay fines while those Iraqis wishing to remain in Jordan will have two months to "rectify" their status and their fines reduced in half. Consular chief confirmed with the Ministry of Interior on February 14 that the Jordan Times article accurately reflected the GOJ policy. UNHCR, meanwhile, said it has not been able to confirm the accuracy of the article, and was still seeking details from the MoI (e.g., what will happen to those Iraqis who wish to stay but can't pay the overstay fine, will Iraqis wishing to stay be given a renewable or a one-time off extension, etc.). UNHCR is planning a public information campaign explaining the visa regime when the plan is officially announced. Additional reaction from the Iraqi Embassy in Amman to be reported septel. Note: Presently, Iraqis who have been illegally present in Jordan and want to return to Iraq must choose between either paying their overstay fines or receiving a stamp on their passport that bars their re-entry to Jordan for a period of five years. It remains unclear whether Iraqis departing under such a waiver would be permitted to return. End Note.

## Status of the GOI 8 million pledge

18. (C) The local Iraqi Embassy DCM told embassy staff February 12 that the \$8 million offered by the GOI to the GOJ has been transferred from the Iraqi Embassy account in Jordan to another account in Jordan controlled by the Iraqi Ministry of Finance. The Iraqi Embassy said if an acceptable mechanism to transfer the \$8 million from the GOI to the GOJ is not found by the end of the month, the funds will be

returned to Baghdad. Embassies Baghdad and Amman continue to work to coordinate an agreement by which the GOI hands the GOJ a check for the funds who, in turn, hands the check to UNHCR. Senior Jordanian officials affirmed to the Ambassador during a February 10 meeting they were amenable to such an arrangement.

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